

An Interview With

McCLELLAN G. DINGS

September 14, 1981

McClellan G. Dings was interviewed on September 14, 1981, in Boulder at the home of Mel Busch, who conducted the interview.

The tape is on file at the Estes Park Public Library and may be checked out. The reader should keep in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written word.

The Estes Park oral history project is jointly sponsored by the Estes Park Area Historical Museum and the Estes Park Public Library.

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Interview with M. G. Dings (MD)
Date of Interview: September 14, 1981
Interviewer: Mel Busch (MB)
Location: Busch Home in Boulder, Colorado

Begin Side 1

MB This is the fourteenth of September, 1981, and we are recording in Boulder, Colorado. The person that we'll be interviewing is Mr. McClellan G. Dings. He lives at 135 South Humboldt in Denver, and he also lives in Estes Park part of the time.

MD Summers.

MB Summers and occasionally on weekends. A lot of the subject of this will be the Big Owl Tea Place, which Aunt Katherine Garetson--

MD Yes, my aunt.

MB --operated from 1915 to, I think, it was 1934.

MD. Yes.

MB Also some of his history and how it relates with his family.

MD So, let's start in. Katherine Garetson lived with us practically all of her life in our same house in St. Louis, lived with my mother and father, my brother, and myself.

In 1909 I had been very, very sick; and they felt quite sure that TB was setting in. So, our doctor advised us to go to Colorado. In the summer of 1909 we went and made our first trip up to Estes Park in a Stanley Steamer, of course. We stayed a few days at the Elkhorn, and then we rented a little cabin for a week or two in Estes Park. I was sort of weak at that time, and while my brother could go on and all that, I had to go along on the little burro that we got at Sam Service's store where the Coffee Cup (Editor's note: Coffee Bar) is now.

MB Right.

MD But then, I improved quite a bit, and we--my parents made a trip up to Long's Peak Inn, and we liked it so much that we spent the balance of the summer up at Long's Peak Inn. Then, we--that included my Aunt Katherine, too--went back there every summer. Well, I've been there and so has my mother every summer clear until now, at least sometimes. Of course, as a youngster, why I spent all summer and all that, but later on I vacationed there. I grew up there.

MB When you first went up there, you were about nine years old then?

MD I was seven years old. It was 1909, and I was born in 1902. St. Louis, in fact, almost all of us came from St. Louis originally; and then, as I say, we just stayed there and eventually bought a couple of acres

- MD from Enos Mills about a third of a mile south of the present Long's Peak Inn. The house was built in 1913, and it's still standing. It's still a beautiful house in a beautiful location. Then, my Aunt Katherine liked it so much that she homesteaded down on Big Owl Road, 160 acres, and I see you have the dates there on which ~~she~~ homesteaded from 19--
- MB 'Fifteen to--
- MD No, 1914, and she proved up in 1917. That's her homestead, but she opened her tea room in 1915. We just thoroughly enjoyed that country. My brother and I as youngsters just had all sorts of fun.
- MB How was the road coming up there the first time you came up?
- MD The first time we came up we had to come up in a horse and buggy from Estes Park to Long's Peak Inn. Then, later on our trunks followed us in a horse and wagon. Then, of course, later on Enos Mills bought a Stanley Steamer, and we would come in from St. Louis to Denver. Usually, we could sometimes catch a train to Lyons or Longmont, spend the night, and come up the next day in the Stanley Steamer.
- MB That's when they'd meet them down there with several--
- MD That's right!
- MB When you first came to Estes, which road did you come up? From Lyons, or would you know?
- MD We came from Lyons.
- MB Was the road about the same place it is now?
- MD No, it was quite different. It was more or less following the stream. They hadn't gotten to the point of putting roads on the side of the hill where the south slope is. As you know, there's a remnant of that road down a little before you get to Pinewood Springs, going down to the valley. Do you know that remnant of the road there?
- MB Yes, and then there's--
- MD But it was quite--I mean it was a very, very narrow road with very few turnouts. If you should happen to meet, somebody had to back up. But then, it was very nice in the Stanley Steamer, and the drivers there would go along and look down at the stream. They'd stop, and you could look down in the stream and see nice big twelve and fourteen inch trout and all that.
- MB Things have changed a little bit, haven't they?
- MD They certainly have, yes, but it was a slow yet very interesting trip. Then, later on when there were the Stanley Steamers, you know, there used to be a train from Boulder up to Ward. It was known as the Switzerland Trail. You remember that, don't you?
- MB Right.

- MD Then, of course, the Stanley Steamer would meet you in Ward, you see, and take you that way.
- MB Yes, I didn't--the main ones I'd heard about were Lyons and Loveland, and so they'd also meet the trains at Ward--from Estes?
- MD Yes, they would.
- MB That was off the old narrow gauge?
- MD Oh, my yes, the old narrow gauge. Sure. It was very interesting. Sometimes you'd have to spend the night in the hotel at Ward, and the Stanley Steamer would meet you the next day.
- MB That's interesting. I hadn't heard about Ward, you know, as far as the Steamers meeting the trains.
- MD Oh, is that right? And you remember the Steamers followed the old railroad grade pretty much so that it was quite a trip.
- MB Yes, that would be great.
- MD Well, then as far as my brother and I were concerned, why I, of course, just really liked that country. You see, I was a licensed guide. I took the government exam at the age of seventeen, and I guided for three summers, mostly Long's Peak. Something rather interesting about the informality of the National Park at that time occurred when I took the oral part of my guide examination from the superintendent who then was L. C. Way. He lived and had a cabin out on the Devil's Gulch Road. They said, "Mr. Way is out there. Go see him." I went out there, and he was up on the roof shingling the roof. Can you imagine the superintendent of the National Park? I climbed up on the roof, and he was hammering away at shingles. He asked me to describe certain things and all that. Then, I went down, and after that passed that all right. Then, I went down, took a long written examination, and got my license. Then, at the ages of seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen, why, I guided. In the spring of 1922 I got a job with the National Park Service as timekeeper on the outfit that was the McCrary (Editor's note: All four auditors came up with this spelling. A check with the McCreery family revealed that no members of that family were here in the winter time then.) outfit, I think, that was clearing the snow off the Fall River Road. In those days they would dynamite and shovel and get the snow out by "slips." You know what those were? Remember those old things that horses pulled?
- MB Yes.
- MD Then, after that was finished, I got on the job in 1922. I beg your pardon, I was twenty in 1922. I was a ranger over in Wild Basin. I just lived in a tent there and went downstream to get my water and and all that.
- MB And that was all summer?
- MD Yes, that was all summer. Then, there was a lapse in time. I'd come up here for my vacation, but I was working. Well, I had had to drop

- MD out of high school. I finished high school, and then it was seven years before I went to college. So, there's an interim in there. Then, let's see, 19-- I was a ranger in Wild Basin for three summers. That would be 1929, '30, and '31. Then, in 1932 I was a ranger-naturalist and stayed down at the YMCA Camp there. Then, my mother-- my father had died a long time ago--had our present house where she had a shop with Kentucky homespun that she sold, some of this very beautiful homespun mostly from Berea, Kentucky.
- MB That gets it up to that point.
- MD That gets me up to that point, yes.
- MB Then, going back, oh, about 1914 or 1911, I guess, is when the Big Owl Tea place was built. Is that right?
- MD I don't think it was actually. I think it was built in 1913, late fall of '13 or 1914.
- MB O.K. I was just remembering that on one of these pictures--and I probably didn't remember it right, I was thinking I saw 1911 on there, but--
- MD That is, let's see, "Cabin....," summer of 1911. No, that should be 1914.
- MB O.K., 1914 then. So, that would go along then--
- MD Yes, she had then--
- MB That open house thing here, or not open house, but housewarming, which was 1914.
- MD Yes, that should be correct.
- MB So, that would be 1914. Photo #1, and as far as going through these photos now, I guess we could do that and give a little--
- MD Oh, yes!
- MB Let's see, this one when it was being built--
- MD Probably 1914.
- MB You had 1911, but I put it on this, and then it will be on here. We'll go back through, and let's see, then, William Wood Dings in the photo. That's your father and husband of Helen G. Dings, who would be your mother.
- MD That's right.
- MB And father of Frederick William Dings and McClellan Dings. That would be you and your brother.
- MD Yes, my brother was two years older than I.

- MB Then, in this next one, which is labeled #2, Miss Garetson and her Great Dane "Gyp."
- MD Gypsy, Gyp. It says, "ca," about 1912. That would be about 1914.
- MB So, that would be about the same date as #1 then?
- MD Yes.
- MB O.K., let's do them this way then. And this would be the same, #3. Then, #4 photograph here is "Big Owl" about 1914 or '15?
- MD Well, now, that's about right.
- MB Right after it was built.
- MD Shortly after it was built, probably about 1915.
- MB So, that would be about 1915. That's #4. Then, #5 is "Sign and Great Dane Gyp," and it's about '15.
- MD About 1915, yes.
- MB That's a handsome sign, isn't it?
- MD Yes, I don't know what became of that.
- MB Then, this one is marked #6, and it says, "Big Owl Tea Place as viewed from Big Owl Hill near present Hooks' cabin." This was taken in 1917?
- MD Yes, approximately.
- MB And all of that was like the Big Owl Hill, and that was part of your aunt's homestead?
- MD Oh, yes, oh my yes!
- MB I just wanted to clear it up on here.
- MD Oh my yes, it is a part of the homestead. It's a beautiful hill.
- MB And this one is #7. "In the winter," this says. About 1914, but maybe '15?
- MD 'Fifteen, I would say probably. These were the interior.
- MB Interior. A lot of these old photographs didn't give many interiors because it was harder to take pictures inside.
- MD Some of them disappeared, too. It was really quite interesting about these chairs. We have one in our house, too. We managed to get it. Those chairs were made especially in St. Louis and sent out then.
- MB And then this is "Unidentified guests at Big Owl Tea Place about 1917."

MB This is the one marked #10. They were really dressed up; at least two of them were!

MD Well, people used to dress up!

MB Yes.

MD ...I had to wear a tie. You know, all the kids did.

MB Yes.

This is back to #8. I got them mixed up a little bit when I dropped them, but this is "Annie--" Maybe you can load that better.

MD "Annie Adele Shreve, Big Owl."

MB And she, you said, was a frequent visitor.

MD Oh, she even spent one winter with her, and she spent all the summer. She was her best friend, lifelong friend in St. Louis.

MB She was from St. Louis, and did she have other things--?

MD Not much. In those days the spinsters sewed and played bridge. They just didn't do much of anything, you see, in those days. She did. She traveled. She went to Europe. She went to Washington.

MB I wasn't sure what she wrote.

MD She wrote quite a bit. I think she had one article published, and I've forgotten--

MB She's a nice-looking lady.

MD She is.

MB Now, this one is marked #9, and maybe you could tell us about that one.

MD Yes, this was that veteran that I was telling you about, you know, that had been gassed in World War I. He would come usually and spend the summers. His name was Martzel.

MB Edward Martzel.

MD Yes, he was called Ed Martzel.

MB And while we were going through this--

MD Incidentally, these menus she gave--it was considered a very expensive place. A large number of the people would come from--oh, the horseback riders from Aspen Ranch and the Stanley and all that. They'd come down, but they'd just fume at the prices, some of them.

MB They don't look like it now, but considering the times it was--. And in this little register, which is the guest register for the house-warming in 1914, there it was called Big Owl Lodge. So, she changed it

MB then later.

MD I know later this tea room--it was a Russian tea room. She had a samovar and all that.

MB But she didn't have actually rooms or anything like that?

MD No.

MB It was mostly just a restaurant?

MD Yes, it was just a restaurant, a tea room.

MB There are some interesting things. We went through these in trying to get them cataloged. Now, John Dickinson Sherman--

MD Oh!

MB We looked up things as far as Who's Who, and it's just splattered all over the place.

MD Well, he was a very, very interesting man. Of course, they homesteaded ... a stone and timber claim on the side of the Twin Sisters.

MB So, he homesteaded. He had a summer place around in the same area.

MD Oh, yes. Well, Mrs. Sherman was very prominent. She was, oh, my goodness, national president of the American--. Oh, what was the big women's organization then in those days? My wife would remember it. But she was very prominent. Of course, John Dickinson Sherman was an editorial writer for the Chicago Tribune.

MB And his son John King Sherman is in the guest books quite a bit.

MD John King Sherman drove for the Transportation Company. He drove for them a good many years. Then, I think the Yellow Cab owned the Transportation Company, and he was transferred to Denver. After a year or so, nobody had--he was married, and I think later divorced. Nobody ever heard where he went.

MB He just sort of disappeared!

MD Well, yes, I mean, not necessarily a deliberate disappearance.

MB But he just faded away?

MD Everybody I've ever known of the old timers, like Grubbs and all those people in Estes Park, I'd ask them; and nobody ever knew whatever--where he finally went.

MB That's interesting. At what time then was he up there, and when did he leave? Do you remember?

MD I wouldn't hazard a guess. I was a kid then catching butterflies and collecting minnows. I do remember though that he had the run from the

- MD Sherman cabin, which was just a short ways. He'd drive his Stanley Steamer over and pick up guests at the Columbines, the Long's Peak Inn, and Hewes-Kirkwood and take them down to the village and back. He was mostly on that shuttle.
- MB Yes. The Sherman place was then just about adjacent to your aunt's place or very close.
- MD You know where our place is, don't you?
- MB Yes.
- MD Well, it's due east and up on the side of the Twin Sisters near the base.
- MB Oh, yes, you mentioned that a minute ago.
- MD It's now owned by the Carlsons, I think, who still have that. They're trying to--they bought that from the Kuhns. The Nitzes bought it from the Shermans years ago.
- MB O.K. Got that! So, then, if you see anything here that jogs you on what you would like--. Now, here's Miss Shreve, who was at the housewarming in 1914. Thanksgiving would be a little bit later and a lot of the same names.
- MD Alfred Oberg was Man Friday at Long's Peak Inn, and he was a very, very fine Swedish fellow that everybody like and everybody knew him.
- MB He was just around there and did all kinds of things?
- MD Sure, he was there all winter, you know, and there weren't many people who stayed around all winter.
- MB No, right, and did he do other things, too, like did he guide, or was he mostly just around?
- MD He was just around--
- MB Taking care of the Long's Peak Inn area?
- MD Yes. Of course, you know that history of Enos Mills, who didn't get along with so many of the other hotel people around there?
- MB Yes. Is there anything in particular about him or any situations that--
- MD I would rather not put in any--
- MB Any editorials?
- MD Well, I don't know so much about all of the squabbles. It was just a perpetual squabble, I mean, for guests at Long's Peak Inn while we were there when he was particularly fighting Charles Hewes, who had the Hewes-Kirkwood Inn. Any guest of his that even went up to the Hewes-Kirkwood

- MD Inn was asked to leave the next day. The same way was true with the Columbines. I think the Bitners had it, and he was--there were the mountains and things there.
- MB And even his brother down at the Craggs.
- MD I know it. Joe Mills, yes. Of course, he has a remnant of a cabin up on Cabin Rock which is up on the side of the Sisters with the Sherman property there. Mr. Enos was a character. It's rather interesting though that in the first summer when we went up there when I was such an invalid, why Enos Mills carried me piggyback up to the beaver dams. I was too weak to walk up there.
- MB That's great!
- MD But he had his peculiarities and very decided peculiarities, but nevertheless, he did a great deal to interest young kids in nature.
- MB Right.
- MD And, of course, he was so influential in the establishment of Rocky Mountain National Park..., and his influence was also--it was supported by Mr. and Mrs. Sherman. They were very, very close for a long time.
- MB And that helped a lot!
- MD Well, because they knew the Secretary of the Interior, and you know that helps a little bit!
- MB Plus, he had the whole Chicago Tribune to editorialize in.
- MD Yes, and then later on there was a disagreement, a falling-out, between the Shermans and Enos Mills.
- MB There were, I think, quite a few fallings-out along the years, but that happens when people have decided ways.
- MD Decided ways. Then, you're in a community where there are not many people, and you're shut in in the winter. All that, so it's typical.
- MB Yes.
- Let's see. Here's another one. From the guest book we determined that she spent a great deal of time in the kitchen and so forth, but I don't know whether that's right.
- MD That's Annabella Sams, isn't it? Isn't that the one?
- MB Yes.
- MD Well, now that is something in the guest book. That is kind of a joke all the way through--Annabella Sams. I think that's it.
- MB Sands or Sams, whatever. O.K. Was she actually a person--?

MD That we do not know absolutely.

MB We've seen it all through there, and we thought possibly that she may have worked in the kitchen there.

MD It's kind of a joke. This may have been some nice-looking gal, you know. Annabella Sams or Annabella Sands was here and all that. We have puzzled over that.

MB I was wondering about that because one of them says something like "the best pea-sheller in the Rocky Mountains," so we thought maybe she worked in the kitchen.

MD No, no!

MB O.K., so we still don't have that one cleared up.

MD No, if you ever did, we'd be interested.

MB Now, on this we weren't quite sure whether that could be dated, or is that more recent than--? That was mixed in.

MD I think this was recent.

MB Yes, I think so, too. She probably got this at the Hummingbird Shop or some place, and it's mixed in with that.

MD There's a picture. Of course, this was the St. Louis Post Dispatch. There's no text.

MB "From Mansion to Cabin: Katherine Griffith Garetson." Now, she was a sister of your mother.

MD That's right.

MB So, your mother's maiden name was Garetson. And so your aunt never married?

MD No, she never married.

MB I read it, and then if I would have let it hit my head, it says "Miss" right here!

MD There were no Ms!'s in those days.

MB This is 1916, I believe.

MD Nineteen sixteen. Now, if that's of any value to you.

MB I think that would be great.

MD You do? Well, fine. Good.

Now, what's the publication on this? It's the "Woman's something," and there is this part of the interior of the Big Owl.

MB Ah, "Tea room in the Rockies." It has the inside and the outside both. That is good. This is not dated, is it?

MD It isn't dated.

MB Pretty well dated from clothing, I suppose, or, you know, come in a general area. Well, we know it's--

MD Well, here's something you might be interested in. This was in 1914-- Enos Mills.

MB "On Train near Omaha. My dear Miss Garetson, Glad to have your note. I've started anyway and hope to get to your city in about a month. I shall write later. Best wishes. Sincerely, Enos A. Mills." So, this would be something that he wrote to her in St. Louis. Possibly, anyway.

MD Well, on the train near Omaha, and yet he's using the Shirley Hotel in Denver stationery. Well, people always used to grab some stationery at the hotel.

MB Yes, sure. Anyway January 2, 1914. That could have been to anywhere, I suppose. Yes, that is good.

MD I don't know what this is. Oh, no, I don't know why I brought this, but this was the last time I climbed Long's Peak. I took my three sons up.

MB So, this is you here and your three sons.

MD Yes, I'm there. This is my oldest son, who is now deceased, and my middle-aged son, who's a professional at the University of Buffalo. That isn't gin he's drinking. It's water.

MD This is my youngest son, Roger.

MB That was in '56.

MD Yes, my one hundred and third trip. That's the last.

MB One hundred and third! Well, you broke a hundred.

MD I did.

MB That's good.

MD There was something. Now, you probably do have a copy of this.

MB I think we do. That looks familiar.

MD By Dean Babcock? You do have that?

MB Yes, we do have one of those.

MD Really surprisingly accurate on so many things.

MB Right. Yes, we have a copy of that.

MD I don't know. Do you want a '21?

MB That's fine. Different years would be great.

MD Well, I really can't think of anything else I brought down here. Now, you start firing questions.

MB Well, one of the things, you mentioned some things--

MD Oh, you want Katherine Garetson's--she was born in 1877 and died in 1963.

MB She was born in St. Louis, I guess. Then, she was up in Estes in that area still when she died or had she gone back?

MD No, she was very feeble at the very last and went out and stayed with my brother. She died in Seattle. And my brother, incidentally, during the depression years worked, you know in those years at any sort of job. He was working in St. Louis for the transit company there. He was--oh, he had an excellent job, and he was laid off cold. He came to Estes Park and stayed at...cabin for a little while. Then, down in Estes he worked for eight or nine years with Hayden Realty Company. Then, he went out to the State of Washington.

MB So, then, he sort of settled in Washington.

MD Yes.

MB I forget. Did you mention whether your brother is still alive?

MD No, my brother isn't alive. In fact, he was really--there was a time I was doing various work, and he was a resident there. He was much better known in Estes Park than I was.

MB Yes, we've seen your name all through the books here.

MD Well, I did a few--crazy kid stuff, some silly stuff.

MB Everybody does occasionally. You should see our guest book at the museum, what some of these kids write.

MD Sure, but we spent a lot of time down at the Big Owl. My brother and I'd go down there. The road would wash out, and we'd work on the road. Then, we'd go down to the tea room and eat up more of the cookies.

MB There were some of the people that you mentioned when you first brought these books.

MD Nitze?

MB Nitze is one, and you might mention for the sake of the recorder about who the Nitzes were and so forth--different ones might be that would be listed in the guest books.

- MD Well, the Nitzes bought the property from the Shermans. It was, I think, 160 acres or maybe 120 on this side of the Twin Sisters. He was the head of the Romance Language Department at the University of Chicago. His wife was a beautiful woman, very pleasant. Everybody liked her. Then, they had a daughter, Elizabeth Nitze, who at one time was chosen among the ten most beautiful women in the United States. She was a beauty, as I remember from sixteen or seventeen. Then, she married Walter Paepcke of Chicago, who was a very well-to-do man. The Paepckes started Aspen, the growth of Aspen. They were very prominent. I think Elizabeth Nitze is still living. Her husband died.
- MB So!
- MD They were very wonderful people. Then, when Mrs. Nitze died, why she had asked that her ashes be spread over that property at the base of Twin Sisters. She was a great friend of my mother, too.
- My mother was quite a person, too.
- MB Well, let's hear about your mother.
- MD She lived to be ninety-one, and a large part of the time why she was up there alone. She liked three things. She liked opera, she liked baseball, and she liked to read "Who-dun-its."
- MB That's a good combination!
- MD Whenever she was listening to baseball,--she was a great Cardinal fan--you didn't dare go in and interrupt her.
- MB Right!
- MD And then Dimitri Mitropoulos, I think, was head of the symphony in Minneapolis. He was out there, and somebody said that she was an admirer of his. He went over and introduced himself. She was very thrilled. And, then, that baseball thing, why Stan Musial of the St. Louis Cardinals--you may have heard of him.
- MB Oh, yes!
- MD Well, he had heard of her interest, and he sent her an autographed photograph of himself, "Best wishes to Helen from Stan."
- MB That's good!
- MD So, she was really a character. She was extremely democratic. I mean her friends ran from very top people and all that and then to the people, the laborers who would come to do work. They just loved her, and she was nice to them.
- MB That's great.
- MD And then in the later years they were all very, very kind to her. They'd come up and plow her road out in winter. They weren't supposed to, but

- MD they'd do it. If there was a lot of snow, the mailman would bring the mail right into the house. There were people who were always checking on her. We'd try to get her to come down to Denver to stay with us, but she'd be down two or three days and "I want to go back."
- MB Yes, yes.
- MD She just loved that country.
- MB I wish some of the other people that knew her were here to ask you some questions.
- MD Yes, but so many of the old Estes Park names, I mean, they were all just familiar to me --those names.
- MB Right.
- MD Of course, as I say, I was a kid, you know. I know the Grubbs, and oh, my goodness, the Johnsons. I told you about Julian Johnson, who homesteaded Lily Lake, and the Rivers.
- MB Now, what about the Rivers? Is there anything in particular?
- MD They were related, Alda (Sp.?) Johnson and the Rivers and the Grubbs and all that. Either, you know...the Grubbs? Mrs. Johnson was a sister, I think, of the Grubbs.
- MB Yes, in those areas in earlier times when it wasn't so populated practically everyone was related to everyone else in one way or another.
- MD Oh my yes!
- Of course, when I went through a year or two in Estes, there wasn't one single restaurant there in the town. You could go to the Elkhorn, the Stanley, the Craggs, or some place like that.
- MB You had to go to the hotels to eat.
- MD There was just one. Let's see, was it the Macdonalds, I think, had a clothing store there, general store. Then, there was one other. The two hotels, of course, were the Hunn Hotel and then the National Park Hotel. I think the National Park Hotel is gone now.
- MB Yes, that's Ripley's Believe It or Not.
- MD Yes, that was Mrs. Byerly who had that. A very pleasant person.
- MB Yes.
- MD And it was an Estes Park....

Begin Side 2

- MD Well, I don't know that that was terribly important like an eighteen-mile round trip to Estes.

- MB Not necessarily real important, just interesting little blurbs about what people used to do.
- MD Yes.
- My brother and I in our early stages up there were always busy, you know, playing in the stream.
- MB Yes, people think that you get off in some of these places, and there's nothing to do. They just don't look for anything to do.
- MD Well, I may not find that real quick. I think I remember what it was that you--
- MB Yes, there were several people that signed, just assuming that one of those in that group had done the drawing.
- MD I'm not sure. Did you find this signature of Charles Evans Hughes?
- MB Charles Edwin?
- MD You know he was a Presidential candidate?
- MB Oh, that. No, I didn't. I think we may have, I don't know. You might go ahead and mention about it; and, then, if we hadn't found it, we'll certainly look for it.
- MD I see. Well, I'm not sure of that, so I'd rather--though I remember very, very well when those Arapaho Indians were up there with Shep Husted.
- MB Oh, yes!
- MD As a matter of fact, I was sitting right on the porch of the Long's Peak Inn when they were there, and Shep Husted, of course, took them and told us so much about how he enjoyed them.
- MB Could you relay some of those stories? Do you remember any of the things about when they were there, anything about them in particular, and about what they were doing?
- MD Well, what they were doing was that the Colorado Mountain Club had arranged to have these Arapaho Indians come up there and give the names of so many of the old peaks and lakes. Shep Husted was the one who guided them around, and one of the--I think it was one of the Rogers who accompanied them on a trip. Then, there was also a Dave Hawkins. I remember those, and they had an interpreter. I remember that very, very plainly. In fact, there is a picture of them--
- MB Yes, we have pictures. I was just wondering about any first hand things that you remember about them.
- MD Well, of course, you see all that I remember of them was just how much Shep Husted enjoyed them. Of course, all I saw of them was there. Then, they took off, you see.

- MB That was in 1914.
- MD You remember better than I do!
- MB Well, that's just in the things, you know, reading the accounts of it and so forth. So, then, that would have made you about twelve or so.
- MD That's right, yes.
- MB That's old enough to remember, but not old enough to really--
- MD That's right!
- MB There are a lot of things that have taken place.
- MD Oh my, I should say so!
- MB This is that picture I was mentioning--
- MD Sometime if you ever see our car up there and you have a few minutes, you should stop in our house. I have a series of photographs here that show various stages of construction of our house.
- MB That would be great.
- MD How they mixed the cement by hand and how the lumber was sawed by hand. It shows the lumber arriving on a wagon pulled by six horses and shows the progress of our fireplace. To a lot of old-timers the name of-- the fireplace was built by Carl Piltz, who was simply an expert mason in those days. His fireplaces all were of native rock back then, collected or gathered within a thousand feet of the house. And he got the tremendous wages of \$6.00 a day, just tremendous! That fireplace is beautiful. Then, in addition to that, I could show you some beautiful carving that John Dickinson Sherman did from a piece of He gave it to my mother.
- MB He was quite an artist besides--
- MD Oh, yes! He was quite a person.
- MB Now, just for the sake of the record here--the location of the tea room and where you lived and so forth.
- MD Well, the Dings' house has a big sign out in front of it--"Dings." That is one-third of a mile south of Long's Peak Inn on the west side in sort of an open space there. It was selected because we could have the most beautiful view of Long's Peak and the Twin Sisters with a little stream about seventy-five feet away where we got our water. Then, the Big Owl Tea Place was about two miles south on the spur road that branches off right just a little beyond Charles Eagleplume's, just a few hundred feet it branches off to the left. It was down about not quite a mile.
- MB Do you know who built that?
- MD I don't know. I think the name Charles Hanson in there. I think that

- MD he built it, but I don't know for sure. I know that this place up on Big Owl Hill--she sold some property there, and the house that was built there. I got a job on that. We mixed the cement down at the stream, and I'd carry it up about two or three hundred feet to the mason. Two buckets of cement!
- MB That'll keep you in shape, wouldn't it? Or else, out of shape?
- MD Thirty-five cents an hour, and I'd just be exhausted. That's the place that is now owned by the Hooks, who are very fine people.
- MB Yes. And you mentioned just next to Charles Eagleplume's is where you cut in, or close by there.
- MD You turn left. It's about--there's a sign there on the sideroad. Go down to the mountain and wind down. The Big Owl Road now has all been sold off in small things. It's a mess. It used to be beautiful.
- MB Yes. Was it likely at the time that Charles Eagleplume's place would have been Perkins'?
- MD That's right. The Perkins place was built, I think, later than the Big Owl.
- MB So, then after--it was in the '20's sometime, I think, when Charles went to the Perkins.
- MD I believe so.
- MB And was there much interaction between the Perkins place and the Big Owl?
- MD No. He had Indian things mostly. She was a tea room.
- MB I was wondering because I thought, you know, the Perkins had a lot of antique items. I thought maybe there might be some kind of thing that would tie together a little bit.
- MD No. Perkins' place was where Eagleplume got a very moderate start and gradually built up, you know.
- MB To what he has now.
- MD Which is simply beautiful and expensive stuff, as you know.
- MB So, I guess, just as a general summary of things, if there's anything that you can think of that you would have experienced or know about that has to do with the general area's history, we'd be glad to have it on.
- MD Tell me--except that Estes Park has grown like the devil!
- MB It has.
- MD I mean, actually we were our Tahosa Valley group; we're pretty much

MD a separate little thing, you know.

MB Right.

MD In fact, I really don't go down to Estes Park unless I just have to and then usually don't go much farther than your museum. That part I don't--

MB I avoid downtown in the summertime as much as possible.

MD Yes.

MB I go after mail, but I usually park at that end of town and walk. It has changed an awful lot.

MD It's still one beautiful setting.

MB Oh, it is!

MD And I remember when I was a ranger there'd be periods in the early spring or in the fall when some of the rangers would have to leave from the gateways and all that. In those days, of course, there was no entrance fee to the National Park; and all we had to do was to go out and hand them a free booklet and ask them whether they had any firearms. If they had firearms, they had to break them, and we had to seal them, put a wire through them and seal them. Oh, I don't know, it was all a very nice thing.

MB Yes. And you were a ranger for what--three years?

MD Altogether, I was a ranger for four summers and a ranger-naturalist for one summer. Five summers. That was spread out between 1922 and 1932.

MB And a good bit of that was down in the Wild Basin area?

MD Oh, a very large part. Oh, yes. Of course, my main thing down there was to look out for fires. I was screaming....

MB Did any of the fires take place around there when you were around and could tell about them?

MD I helped fight the fire on the Twin Sisters. Don't ask me exactly. You've got a history of that. I was in Wild Basin at the time, and I came up to help fight that fire. There were a couple of little interesting things about it. I took my glasses. They got a truck quite a ways up, and I took my jacket--a jacket something like this, took my glasses off, and left them there when I went up to fight the fire. Then, when I got back, why somebody had stolen my jacket, but had been kind enough to take my glasses out and leave them on the truck seat.

MB At least they didn't get your glasses.

MD Yes, and then there was also--I don't know, I wouldn't care to state

- MD the exact number of things and all that the National Park Service lost. I don't know how many shovels they took up and axes and all that, but when they got back, about one or two per cent were left. The rest of them "walked off." Of course, axes used to be one of the first things that were stolen.
- MB Yes, well they were--
- MD You'd leave them outside.
- MB Handy tool!
- MD Yes.
- MB Somebody would just stick one into a fence post or something, or leave it in the woodpile and walk away.
- MD Sure.
- MB Are there any other of the fires that you were in on mainly?
- MD No.
- MB Just mainly that one.
- MD Of course, it was sort of ludicrous to me that the Allenspark fire that started up near Ouzel Lake was let to burn. Oh!
- MB That was just a year or so ago.
- MD Yes, but I was very fortunate. I mean that the choicest ranger station and district in the whole Park was the Wild Basin District. I was very fortunate in getting it when I wanted it.
- MB Yes, now, Jack Moomaw did quite a bit in the Wild Basin area, too.
- MD Oh, he tramped around. Oh, yes. You know when the National Park started, they just had one ranger; and that was Dixie MacCracken. Does that name register with you?
- MB Oh, yes!
- MD He was a great friend of my mother.
- MB We saw his name quite a few times in the book, in the guest book.
- MD Yes. You know, Jack Moomaw really knew that whole country. An actual mountain man.
- Well, let's see, I've helped get three bodies from Long's Peak, one on tiptop and two others down near Chasm Lake. Jack Moomaw was in on the one where we had to go about half way down the east side. These two Swiss people were stuck; I think their name was Thatcher. We had to get them off. They'd gotten above Broadway, and there was snow in there. After their companion had slipped above and gone over, they lost their

MD nerve and hollered. Jack Moomaw,, and I went up to the top and down there. It was very easy to get them out with a rope. We just got above them, threw the rope, and panniered them across. They could have dug their way across.... Then, we went down to the base. I tell you when you pick up a body that's cascaded down that and is in the snow pit, why you just can't believe the black and blue. The bruises are just black.

MB That would be quite an experience.

MD Quite, it was. Those were the days. I remember when the person who was struck by lightning tiptop was a big, heavy man, and we were twenty-two hours--there were eight of us--bringing this body down. We brought it down to Wild Basin, and those were the days when, I think, I'm not sure whether it was Roger Toll or John Preston who went right along and helped us bring the body down. Superintendent's work!

MB The force wasn't quite as big then.

MD No, it was a kind of a very informal bunch down there.

MB That's another thing that has changed quite a bit.

MD Oh, my goodness, now everybody's got a title.

MB Yes, and some of them don't mean that much.

MD I know it.

But up in Wild Basin, if I'd allowed them to camp at the end of the road up there, if I had two campers, it was a crowd in those days. Often none. I could hike up to Thunder Lake and all that without seeing a single person, which was wonderful, you know.

MB Yes. You can hardly get on any of the trails anymore without having them crowded.

MD No, right.

MB There was one thing, getting off that just a bit, that I just happened to remember. In the back of this book, the tea place actually closed in '34 as far as for business and so forth.

MD Of course, that's the--

MB This is the beginning book, the first volume of the three, but then it gets into things. Let's see, 1924 is this book, and then it afterwards is evidently about people who would come to visit. Then, it gets into 1939, '40, '42, '45, '46, and '47. Do you know anything about what those would be?

MD Probably my guess would be that--let's see, the date in the other was what?

MB I'll see the next one.

MD The last one.

MB The last one?

MD What did I say?

MB Here's this one which is '32. The last one in here is Arabella Sands! Then, it goes into '33, September 1, 1933. Let's see if this one--

MD This is funny. This one clear on to the '42 book. Now, what may have happened is--you see the people that--when my aunt sold Big Owl, she just really was a terribly, terribly sick person, physically and mentally. She sold the whole thing for just a song. The people who got the books --for a long time we tried to get these from them, these registers, and they wouldn't part with them. It just may have been--no, it couldn't have been because this was '24. I was just thinking it might have been some of their--

MB I would say it would be after these others.

MD Well, sure.

MB And, then, it went back to the end of this book.

MD I just don't know because the Stefflers (Sp.?) were the people she sold it to.

MB Those were the ones that bought it? They wrote in--that's what date there?

MD Yes.

MB Nineteen forty-five.

MD You see, that's more like it.

MB So, those were the people to whom she sold the place, the Stefflers.

MD Yes, and these may be friends of the Stefflers, you see, or relatives that came later.

MB Yes, right. And that would be about when she sold it, or was it earlier than that when she sold it?

MD I'd hate to say for certain.

MB Yes. It's not real important. We just happened to notice these later dates in here, and I thought--

MD No, because it could have been around then, yes.

MB Along about the end of the war.

MD Yes. I was over in Okinawa at the time. I'm just sorry that--

MB No, that's fine. Those are really interesting.

MD I think they are.

MB That's a great thing to have, to preserve because they have the signatures of so many people that were prominent not only in the Estes Park area, but all over.

MD That's right. They did. Oh, my wife was just absolutely sick trying to get those guest registers. She tried for a long, long time, and they wouldn't part with them. Then, as she told you, why they came up one day when they were leaving and gave them up. They had to leave, I think, on account of his health. The registers meant more to my wife almost than they did to me, you know; and so, she was very, very appreciative of that.

MB Yes, that's great, and we're appreciative of having them, too, as far as the museum goes.

MD Good.

MB Well, I sure appreciate your coming.

MD You're very welcome.

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(Interview with McClellan G. Dings)